there are approximately 900 Indian fishermen in Pakistan's custody who have been detained by Pak authorities between October, 2003 and December, 2004. The fishermen who were arrested earlier were released by the Government of Pakistan between February and November, 2003.

Out of these 900, 266 fishermen have been granted consular access in March, 2004. Pakistan Government has recently indicated its readiness to release these 266 fishermen. Government is in constant touch with the Government of Pakistan for early consular access for the remaining Indian fishermen.

Government has consistently taken up the issue of release and repatriation of detained fishermen with the Government of Pakistan through diplomatic channels. During the Foreign Secretary level talks held in New Delhi on June 27-28, 2004, it was agreed to release all the apprehended fishermen in each other's custody and to put in place a mechanism for the return of unintentionally transgressing fishermen and their boats from the high seas without apprehending them. This issue was also raised during the meeting between the Foreign Ministers of the two countries in New Delhi on September, 5-6, 2004 and again during the recent visit of the Prime Minister of Pakistan to New Delhi on November 23-24, 2004.

WRITTEN ANSWERS TO UNSTARRED QUESTIONS

Promotion of coir industry

2210. SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA: Will the Minister of AGRO AND RURAL INDUSTRIES be pleased to state:

(a) the steps Government have taken to promote coir industry through Coir Board in non-traditional zone;

(b) the steps taken to maximize husk collection in non-traditional zone; and

(c) whether Government propose to merge Coconut Development Board and Coir Board to maximize husk collection in general and non-traditional zone in particular?

THE MINISTER OF AGRO AND RURAL INDUSTRIES (SHRI MAHABIR PRASAD): (a) Steps taken to promote the coir industry in the non-traditional areas *viz.*, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Goa, Maharashtra, Assam, Tripura, Pondicherry, Lakshadweep, West Bengal

and Jharkhand include (i) extension of financial assistance for renovation of existing units, setting up new coir units and purchase of generator sets for running coir units, (ii) conducting entrepreneur development programmes and quality improvement programmes for entrepreneurs, (iii) organizing exposure tour of entrepreneurs to traditional coir producing areas to acquaint them with the latest developments, (iv) technical assistance in setting up coir units, (v) field demonstration on applications of latest technology, etc.

(b) Steps taken to maximize husk collection in non-traditional areas include (i) area development activities in coconut producing States, (ii) skill development programmes and (iii) awareness-building programmes.

(c) No, Sir. The functions of the Coconut Development Board (CDB) and the Coir Board are different. While the CDB is mainly concerned with the promotion of coconut cultivation and marketing of coconut products, Coir Board is concerned with the development of coir and coir products and overall promotion of the coir industry. The coir industry, which is an export-oriented industry earning foreign exchange, provides employment to over five lakh people. The merger of the Coir Board with CDB might result in loss of focus on the coir industry.

Margin money scheme

2211. SHRI SUDARSHAN AKARAPU: Will the Minister of AGRO AND RURAL INDUSTRIES be pleased to state:

(a) whether Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) had launched Margin Money Scheme for setting up agro based and rural industries;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the number of agro and rural industries assisted under the scheme during the last three years, State-wise; and

(d) the total amount sanctioned and spent under the scheme?

THE MINISTER OF AGRO AND RURAL INDUSTRIES (SHRI MAHABIR PRASAD): (a) and (b) The Government had launched, through the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC), the Margin Money Scheme. This Scheme is now known as the Rural Employment Generation Programme (REGP). REGP is meant to promote and assist establishment of self-employment projects in the sector of village industries,